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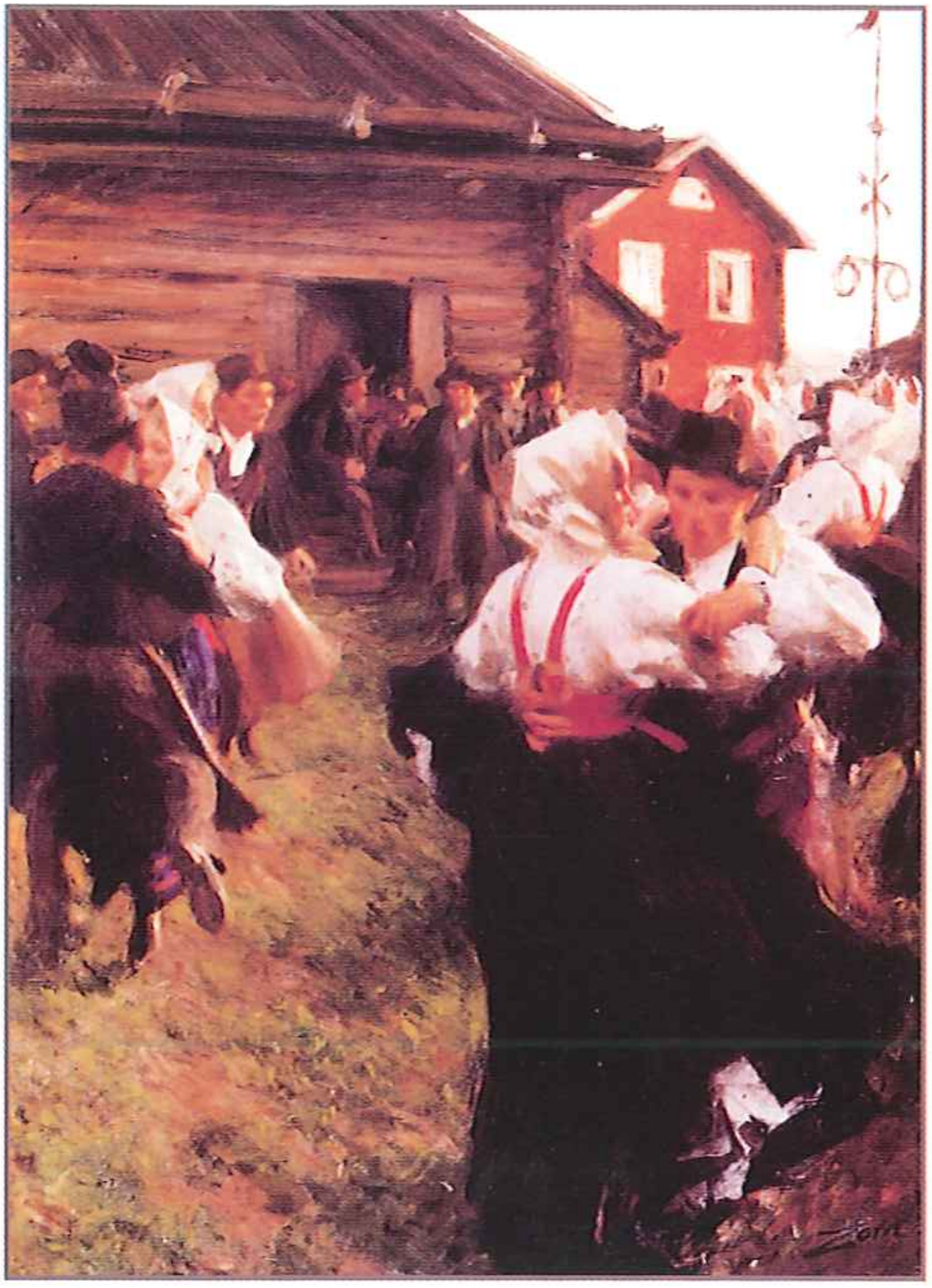

GRIEG

Lyric Pieces
(Selection)

Einar Steen-Nøkleberg,
Piano

Edvard Grieg (1843 - 1907)

Lyric Pieces (Selections)

Among Grieg's works the *Lyric Pieces* seem to have a special place with a special significance in their order. That he apparently viewed them in the same way is clear from the fact that his last lyrical piece, *Remembrances, Op. 71, No. 7*, quotes his first piece, *Arietta, Op. 12, No. 1*. Thus the circle is completed, marking the end of the period in which he was concerned with this type of piano piece, a type that the whole world loved, admired, and above all, played. Even though he revealed his deepest, most intimate, feelings, in many of the lyrical pieces, the music remains approachable and is often played. It would probably be hard to find the piano student who has not learned to love these lyrical pieces, in spite of their occasional difficulty, and does not feel that the struggle has been worth while, if the results are good. One should ignore the fact that they have at times been looked upon with disdain as inferior. In fact they have survived as music that is both living and vital, because they are so strongly rooted in the consciousness of the people.

The expression *Lyric Pieces* is actually Grieg's own invention, but does not describe a genre. Character-pieces for the piano, with or without descriptive titles, have a long tradition and Grieg is only one to contribute to this, although his contribution is a very important one. Each of his lyric pieces, like Mendelssohn's, *Lieder ohne Worte*, expresses only one mood, one feeling. From the publication of the second book, in 1883, (the first one came out in 1867), he went on to publish collections of lyric pieces at regular intervals, until 1901. They cover the greater part of Grieg's life as an established composer, and represent more or less every single facet of his personal style.

No attempt has been made to hide the fact that the lyric pieces gradually became good business, both for Grieg himself, as well as for the publishers. In a letter to Peters, Grieg called them *Semmeln* - fragrant, fresh-baked, bread - and the fact of the matter is that they indeed sold like "hot cakes". No wonder the publisher Peters, in London and Frankfurt, was delighted every time Grieg delivered a manuscript for a new album of piano pieces. He was strongly attached to many of these pieces and enjoyed playing them, while there were others that he was not pleased with at all. In a letter to his friend, Emil Horneman, he writes:

My Silence is unforgivable, because I honestly haven't done anything, other than the so called, "Lyrical Pieces", which are surrounding me like lice and fleas in the country. (Letter to Emil Horneman, 15th September, 1898)

Other people also made snide remarks about them, such as Debussy's comment that the lyric pieces were like "pink candies filled with snow", probably alluding to the pink covers on the editions of the albums from Peters.

Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* contain 66 compositions, published in ten albums, during the years from 1867 to 1901. Most of these albums were printed again several times, and many of the pieces were published separately. Several of the most popular of them were published in innumerable arrangements, some by Grieg himself, but mostly by others.

From the last two albums we see that a certain kind of weariness crept into Grieg's life and work. He also mentions this himself. It was not a lessening of ability, as he so often feared might happen with age, because he knew that he still had the power to compose, but not always when the publisher or the public wanted him to do so. In *Book 8, Op. 65*, which was issued in 1897, just one year after the previous album, there are many examples that show that Grieg's inspiration had not abandoned him. High on the list is *No. 6, Wedding-Day at Troldhaugen*, a festive work which was originally a present for Nina Grieg, his wife, on their wedding-day, 11th June. Grieg wrote the same piece to commemorate the fiftieth birthday of a dear friend of theirs, Nancy Giertsen, and gave it the title, *Bearers of Glad Tidings*. When proof-reading the first edition, however, he changed the title to the one we know it by today, *Wedding-Day at Troldhaugen*. In the first piece of the eighth set, *From Days of Youth*, Grieg looks back with an element of despair and melancholy in his tone. The second, *Peasant's Song*, and the fifth, *In Ballad Style*, reminds us again of his unpretentious spontaneity as we know it from some of the compositions from the first of the *Lyric Pieces*. In the third, *Melancholy*, and the fourth, *Drawing-Room*, it is the harmonic subtleties that are the most important element.

The next to last collection of *Lyric Pieces, Book 9, Op. 68*, was published in 1899. We again find a mixture of salon compositions, laced with harmonic subtleties, as in the third and sixth pieces, *At Your Feet* and *Melancholy Waltz*, and pieces that have their roots in Norwegian landscape and in folk-music. *Cradle-Song, No. 5*, belongs to this category, and both from a melodic as well as harmonic point of view, it could have been a part of *Op. 66*, the *19 Norwegian Folk-Songs*. The most interesting piece in the album, however, is the fourth, *Evening in the Mountains*. In the manuscript from 1898 Grieg has also used the titles: *Cow-Call*, and *The Mountaineer's Song*, and on a copy he gave to Marie and Frants Beyer, on their silver wedding anniversary in 1902, he wrote: *Imagine the Evening Atmosphere at Utladalen, (Skogadals-boen), the mountain farm in Jotunheimen*. Grieg also writes to Beyer:

Just thinking of the mountain-tops, I feel that I can breathe more easily, and I am filled with a greater love of life. (Letter to Frants Beyer, 15th February, 1899)

It was approximately at this time that Grieg rearranged *Cradle-Song*, and *Evening in the Mountains* for string orchestra, a version published in 1900, with the second piece scored also with oboe and French horn.

In 1901 Grieg brought to an end his series of *Lyric Pieces* with the publication of *Book 10, Op. 71*. It can be understood that he intended this to be definite and conclusive, because he includes in the last piece of the last book *Memories, No. 7*, a quotation from the first piece of the first collection, *Arietta*. Now, however, it has been transformed into a vulnerable, melancholy waltz, of the type one might dance when the party is over, where, in spite of being a little intoxicated, one may try to maintain an image of propriety. In the end everything dies out in *ppp*. This is not the only piece which alludes to the past. In the fifth piece, *Halling*, a folk-dance, he uses the thematic material of *Bridal Procession, Op. 19, No. 2*, and this is one of the most technically demanding folk-dance inspired pieces he ever wrote.. As in *Opus 57* and *65*, he also opens this collection with a nostalgic piece which looks back to the earlier years, *Once upon a time*, and to make it clear that everything comes to an end, he takes yet another bitter-sweet, backward glance in *Forbi* (Gone), as the collection's next to last piece. It has written over it, *In Memoriam*, a reminder of the past. At the same time he looks forward with a partly impressionistic and extremely sentimental *Summer Eve, No. 2* and *Peace of the Woods, No. 4*. After much careful planning, he placed the goblin *Puck*, between them, a piece, which, with its lightness and vivacity, does not give the impression of old age, or that life that has passed one by.

The series was supposed to end with *Opus 71*, but in fact yet another book of piano pieces was published, which in character and content belongs to the *Lyric Pieces*. This is *Moods, Op. 73*. In this series it is recorded and discussed in another connection.

Einar Steen-Nökleberg

The Norwegian pianist Einar Steen-Nökleberg, an early winner of the German High School Piano Competition. Other prizes include the Norwegian Piano Competition in 1972, and in 1975 the Norwegian Critics Prize for Best Performance, awarded after a performance of Grieg's *Piano Concerto* at the Bergen Festival. In 1976 he was honoured for the Norwegian recording of the Year for a recital of music by Norwegian Baroque composers. Other awards include the Grieg Prize in 1985 and in 1992. From 1975 to 1981 Einar Steen-Nökleberg was professor of piano at the Hanover Musikhochschule and in recent years has enjoyed an international career, with recitals throughout Europe, in the United States of America and in the former Soviet Union.

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STEREO

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Playing Time: 73'24"

Edvard GRIEG
(1843 - 1907)

Lyric Pieces

Einar Steen-Nøkleberg, Piano

Book 1, Op. 12

1	No. 1, Arietta	(1:23)
2	No. 4, Elves' Dance	(0:48)
3	No. 5, Folk Song	(2:01)

Book 2, Op. 38

4	No. 1, Cradle Song	(2:51)
5	No. 2, Folk Song	(1:48)
6	No. 5, Folk Dance	(1:10)
7	No. 7, Waltz	(1:23)

Book 3, Op. 43

8	No. 1, Butterfly	(1:53)
9	No. 4, Little Bird	(1:46)
10	No. 6, To the Spring	(2:53)

Book 4, Op. 47

11	No. 1, Valse Impromptu	(3:54)
12	No. 2, Album Leaf	(3:05)
13	No. 3, Melody	(4:43)
14	No. 4, Norwegian Dance	(1:15)

Book 5, Op. 54

15	No. 1, Herd Boy	(4:34)
16	No. 2, Norwegian March	(3:13)
17	No. 3, March of the Trolls	(3:00)
18	No. 4, Nocturne	(4:28)

Book 6, Op. 57

19	No. 6, Nostalgia	(4:50)

Book 7, Op. 62

20	No. 3, French Serenade	(1:52)
21	No. 4, Brooklet	(1:34)
22	No. 6, Homeward	(2:44)

Book 8, Op. 65

23	No. 5, In Ballad Style	(3:34)
24	No. 6, Wedding Day at Troldhaugen	(6:00)

Book 9, Op. 68

25	No. 5, Cradle Song	(2:11)

Book 10, Op. 71

26	No. 3, Puck	(1:36)
27	No. 7, Remembrances	(2:51)

Tracks from Naxos 8.553394, 8.553395 and 8.553396.

Recorded at Lindeman Hall, Norwegian State Academy of Music, Oslo, from 18th to 30th December, 1993.
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Engineers and Editors: Jørn Pedersen, Morten Lindberg and Victor Engholmen
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Cover Painting: Midsummer Dance by Anders Zorn

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